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RESEARCH DESIGN FOR INVESTIGATIONS AT THE
RUBEN HANCOCK SITE, 41TV875
TRAVIS COUNTY, TEXAS

By:
John W. Clark, Jr.

Texas
State Department of Highways and Public Transportation
Highway Design Division
Austin, Texas
March 1985

INTRODUCTION

The Ruben Hancock Site (41TV875) is located on the centerline of the extension of Parmer Lane. This extension begins at FM 1325 (Burnet Road) and terminates at FM 620. The site was found during a survey of the right-of-way conducted by the author on the 9th of August, 1984. Other sites were found during the survey but were too ephemeral or too disturbed to warrant further investigation. It was judged at the time of the survey that the Ruben Hancock Site, because of its undisturbed condition and the presence of metal and glass artifacts, warranted further investigation. It was suggested that the testing consist of a metal detector survey.

The metal detector survey indicated the presence of buried metallic artifacts in a core area. The results indicate that there are both exposed and buried features at the site (Appendix I).

In accordance with *Procedures for the Protection of Historic and Cultural Properties* (36 CFR, Part 800), prescribed and endorsed by the Federal Highway Administration, and in concurrence with the Office of the State Historic Preservation Officer, affected sites were evaluated with regard to their potential for eligibility for inclusion within the National Register of Historic Places. The sites likewise were evaluated for their suitability as state archaeological landmarks since they will be on state land once the right-of-way has been purchased and will fall under the aegis of the Texas Antiquities Code.

✓ SITE DESCRIPTION AND ENVIRONMENT

The site is situated on the left bank of Walnut Creek near its head. It is located at the foot of a low hill adjacent to the creek. Evidence of cultural activities at the time of site occupation and subsequently serve to define the site boundaries. The site is bounded on the north by an abandoned east-west road which crosses the creek. The east boundary consists of a shallow ditch or trench for a buried sewer line cut into limestone bedrock. The south boundary consists of a barbed wire fence, and the west boundary is in part a stone yard fence and abandoned wood or barbed wire fence line indicated by a linear growth of hackberry trees. The highest point of the site is the northeast corner; the site slopes to the southwest. The west boundary runs parallel to the creek.

Soils at the site are alluvial-colluvial. The deposit increases in depth from nonexistent on the east side of the site where cretaceous limestone bedrock is exposed to approximately 2 to 3 ft. near the creek. The deposit consists of sandy loam and light clay originating from overbank deposition from the creek and slope-wash off the adjacent hill. The deposits contain small (2 to 3 mm in diameter) limestone pebbles.

Vegetation on the site consists of large and small live oaks, junipers, hackberries, smaller shrubs, and a variety of short grasses and forbs. Hackberries tend to form alignments along former fence lines. The area east of the site was a former plowed field and hence is covered in a variety of short and tall grasses and forbs. Southeast of the site is a baseball complex serving the Waters Park area. Adjacent areas to the south, west, and north are wooded.

Cultural features visible on the surface of the site include a stone-lined, hand-dug well at the eastern margin of the site. Approximately 20 ft. west is a galvanized pipe hole of a drilled well. Still farther west is an old fence dividing the site in half. Adjacent to the drilled well on the east side of the fence is a small pen formed by barbed wire and cedar (juniper) post fencing. One post in the fence contains many cut nails.

At the northwest corner of the site is a low, dry-laid stone wall, probably the lower segment of a post and barbed wire fence running east-west about 40 ft. and north-south about 80 ft. Along the north margin of the site is a clear swale representing an abandoned road.

Artifactual evidence of occupation also is found at the site. This evidence consists of numerous tin cans and pieces of sheet iron adjacent to the hand-dug well, a concentration of barbed wire and barrel hoops at one point on the barbed wire fence, and thinly scattered pieces of wire and sheet iron in other areas of the site. One glass sherd and one plain white pearlware sherd were also observed on the surface. The only diagnostic artifacts observed were the cut nails in the fence post suggesting a pre-1890 construction.

A map of the site, illustrating the grid and the results of the metal detector survey, is shown in Fig. 1.

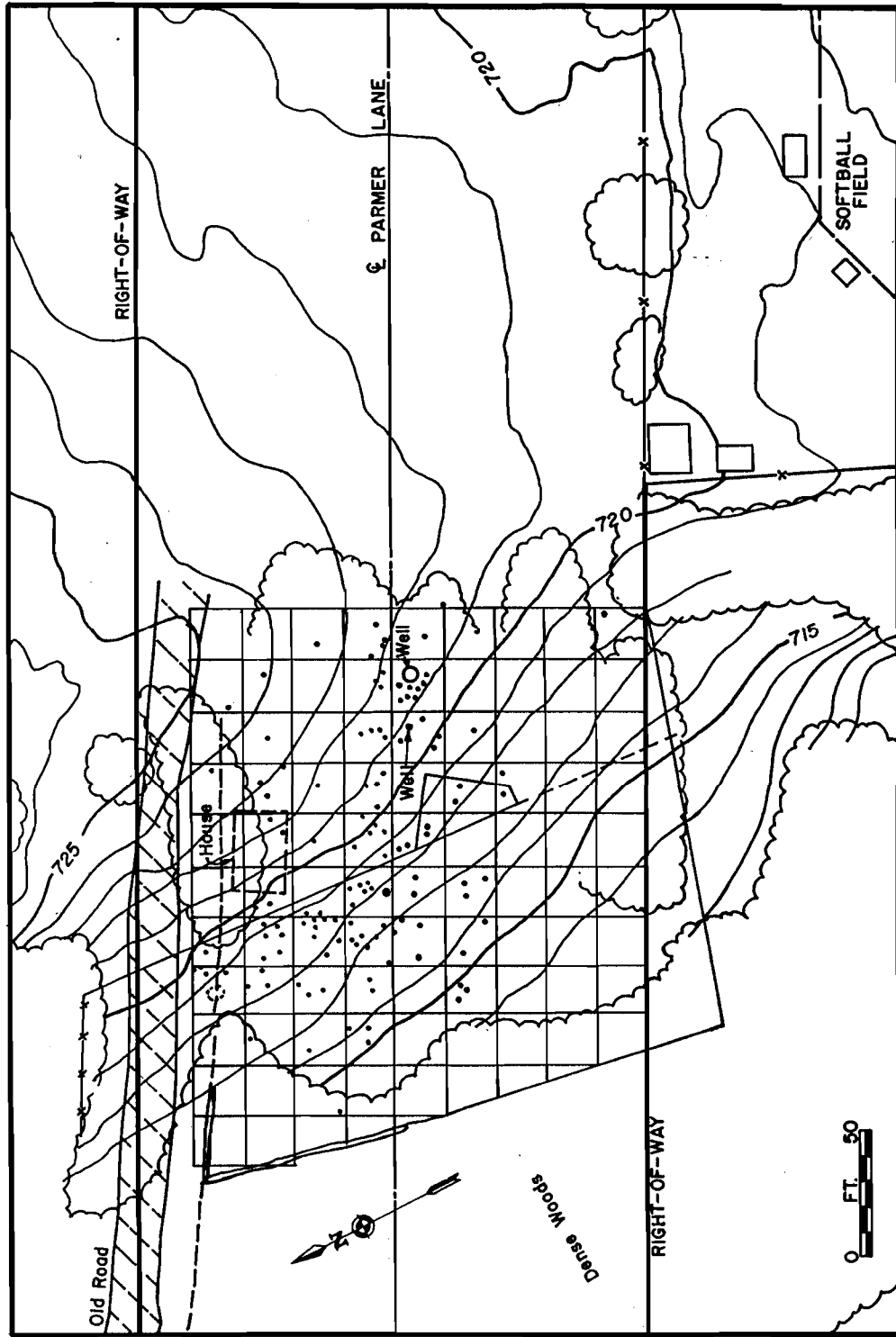


FIGURE 1. Plan view of site, grid, and results of metal detector survey.

RESULTS OF TESTING

Although the site appears to be bounded as previously described, the metal detector indicates a much smaller area of intensive occupation, an area 140 by 100 ft. the metal detector was unable to detect individual nails and strands of barbed wire. No high concentration of hits was detected in an area of the site thought to be, from surficial alignments of stone, the locality of the house. The metal detector did indicate, however, the presence of concentrations of metallic objects which was the purpose of the test.

RESULTS OF ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

At the present time over 2100 pages of archival material have been collected relating to this site and the sites in the nearby Waters Park community. It is felt that a detailed summary of this material is more appropriate to the final report than to the research design. However, the area under consideration was a part of Stephen F. Austin's last empresario grant and was known as Austin's Little Colony. Although there were many land grants in the area, virtually none of the land in Travis County was occupied before 1840. The particular land in question was apparently not occupied until after the Civil War. Following removal of the majority of the Indians in 1840, settlers moved onto adjacent land; many being progenators of occupants of the Waters Park community. The community of Waters Park developed after the arrival of the railroad in 1881 on the northeast corner of a 2/3 league grant to James B. Rogers. This land was acquired by Silas B. Summers, who, with railroad officials, promoted a resort community which thrived until about 1920. The ethnic makeup of the community included a majority of Anglo farmers and their families, Mexican-American railroad workers(who later worked for Austin White Lime Co. and are buried at McNeil) and blacks who were small farmers, laborers, and servants.

The property on which Site 41TV875 is situated was originally one labor of land granted to Thomas M. Fowler by the Republic of Texas in 1837 (Travis County General Land Office, File 523). Fowler assigned the land to Wilson Biggs in 1838 and he in turn transferred it to John P. Harcourt, an attorney, possibly in settlement of debts(Travis County General Land Office, File 523). Harcourt retained title of the land on which one F. W. Chandler was a squatter. Harcourt obtained final clear title in 1875(Travis County Deed Records, Vol. 31:560-561).

For some time the land title was unclear, evidently muddled by the Chandler claim. In any event, the land was owned prior to 1900 by Ruben Hancock and his heirs(Travis County Deed Records, Vol. 198-309).

Affidavits by Mrs. Susie Dickerson, one of Hancock's heirs (Travis County Deed Records, Vol. 706:64, Vol. 700:486-488), and by Jay W. Barnes and wife Helen (Travis County Deed Records, Vol. 1489:179-183) indicate that Ruben Hancock purchased the land from one Anderson Peoples, believed to be his wife's brother, in 1881 and resided on the property. Mrs. Dickerson, Hancock's daughter, sold the property to Earl and Flossie Gregory in 1942 (Travis County Deed Records, Vol. 700:486-488). The Gregorys later sold an easement to W. J. Simpson (Travis County Deed Records, Vol. 1489:173-178). The land eventually was purchased by the Burnet Road Land Joint Venture of Houston.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

The objectives of mitigation are ^{so many} numerous because of the nature of the resource to be mitigated. When one is dealing with an historic site, one has a much wider range of cultural and historical data available than one would have with a prehistoric site. Therefore, the objectives are somewhat different than one would propose for a prehistoric site. The resource considered here consists of one early Negro rural farmstead. Historic sources for this site consist of a variety of documentation including deed and tax records, census data, military records, eye-witness accounts of events in the area, railroad records, ^{and} photographs, and more. The site itself contains discrete features, a variety of artifacts, and horizontal relationships that provide much cultural data.

Among the objectives of mitigation of the site are the following:

1. To provide a chain of deed records of sales and purchases for the property involved.
2. To provide an historical background including as much biographical and genealogical information as possible.
3. To associate the site with the Afro-American-Texas and Central Texas contemporary study units as defined in Brown *et al.* (1982).
4. To collect informant data on the cultural life at the Waters Park community.
5. To define spatial and cultural relationships for sites involved in the project area ^{and} Waters Park;
6. To discuss the architecture of the site.
7. To define the horizontal or spatial relationships within the site, compared to the other sites in the area and compared to sites in other areas where appropriate studies have been conducted.
8. To define patterns of artifact type frequencies for the site and compare the results to other sites.
9. To discuss the market system utilized by the site occupants with regard to artifact sources, both local and national.
10. To examine certain artifact categories with regard to their expression of relative wealth or status.

11. To discuss family and demographic patterns in relation to other areas of nineteenth century America.
12. To discuss subsistence as reflected by artifacts and organic materials at the sites.

In order to realize these objectives, a variety of methods will be utilized. At the present time a moderate amount of archival data has been collected including deed records, historical eye-witness accounts, origins of settlers, informant data, and genealogical information. Pursuit of documentary or archival information will continue in order to provide adequate information to achieve Objectives 1 through 5. This will involve work at the Barker Texas History Center, State Archives, State Library, County Courthouse, Travis County Collection, interviews, visitation of a nearby Negro cemetery, and other efforts.

To achieve Objective 6, the features will be exposed, photographed, drawn, and compared to similar features still standing at other sites, visible in historic photographs, and otherwise documented, in order to develop as complete architectural reconstruction as possible. Objective 7 will be achieved through the gridding of the site and excavation or surface collection of the material. This procedure will be done via the establishment of grids (in the English measurement system, since this was the system used to construct the site) and the passing of excavated material through 0.25 in. hardware cloth. The deposits are extremely shallow and not stratified, so except in an unforeseen deep deposit, no vertical level increments will be utilized.

Objective 8 can be achieved by cataloging artifacts in preestablished categories (South 1977), quantifying them, and comparing them to artifact patterns defined in the existing literature. The actualization of Objective 9 involves the identification of place of manufacture of as many artifacts as possible. This procedure is relatively easy for ceramics and bottles. Many of these will represent national brands, while some will pertain to local distributors. Again, this information can be quantified and compared to other sites.

Objective 10 is likewise relatively easy to deal with. Certain kinds of ceramics, for example, are known to have been less expensive than others; the same is true with liquors, art glass, and other items in general use. The presence/absence of certain types of artifacts, as well as tax records, should provide the requisite data. There have been studies of family relationships and demography (Hareven and Vinovskis 1978) which will provide comparative data to which information generated by this project may be compared. Finally, subsistence evidence such as bottles, cans, and so forth, and actual food remains such as fruit pits, bones, egg shells, seafood shells, and so forth, will be studied. Bones can provide information on what animals were utilized, how they were cut, relative expense of cuts, and preferences of individual families, for example.

The objectives of mitigation herein listed have, as their common goal, the development of information on (1) the level of integration of the inhabitants of the area into national and local markets,(2) material manifestations of ethnicity and social status, and (3) horizontal patterning of artifacts and the functional pattern of artifacts as a manifestation of culture. Other goals include the development of a local history of the project area, encompassing land transactions, patterns of inheritance, family relationship patterns, demography of the area, and subsistence.

EXCAVATION STRATEGY

The initial placement of units to be excavated will be determined utilizing data obtained from evaluation of the evidence of features visible on the surface as well as from data obtained from the metal detector survey. All units will be excavated to culturally sterile soil (a depth which is estimated to be less than 1 ft.).

- (1) Excavation units will be standard 5-ft. units oriented to the centerline of the Parmer Lane extension. The centerline runs east to west through the site. A highway station marker will be used as the primary datum.
- (2) Excavation units will be given directional and incremental designations.
- (3) Initial excavation will focus on known features such as the hand-dug well and the yard fence. The well will be excavated as a feature and an attempt will be made to locate trash deposits associated with the fence. The locating and identifying of structures will be the focus of a number of prospecting units to be dug at 20-ft. intervals. The placement of these units will be designed to traverse the site until the location of any structures present is known. This endeavor will be aided by metal detection data produced in the testing phase of the project.
- (4) If and when evidence of structures is located, excavation units will be chosen which will explore the structure's size and configuration, as well as provide for artifact recovery and acquisition of other cultural data.
- (5) It is estimated that approximately 50 to 75 units will be excavated to provide for obtaining data as outlined in this research design.
- (6) Selected units will be excavated to greater depths in order to prospect for evidence of prehistoric occupation at the site.

(7) Records will include notes on each unit excavated, bag logs, photographs and photographic logs, a daily site log, and other documentation as deemed necessary.

(8) Careful consideration has been given to a suggestion concerning excavation of 18-in. units within the established 5-ft. grid. Although this alternate excavation method may be valuable in many situations, conditions at Site 41TV875 are believed to limit its usefulness. Soil conditions are such that evidence of wooden piers is not expected to be present. The location of structures may only be demonstrated through concentrations of nails along the walls, as was the case at Waters Park.

PERSONNEL, DURATION, CURATION, REPORTING

The project director in charge of the field work and report writing will be John W. Clark, archaeologist for the Texas State Department of Highways and Public Transportation (SDHPT), Highway Design Division, Archaeology Section. Clark is a member of the Society of Professional Archeologists and is qualified in field research and historical archaeology. He has extensive experience in a wide variety of historic sites, both as director of the excavation and as author of the final report. Crew members will be provided by the District 14 office of the SDHPT.

The duration of the project will be dependent on several factors, including crew size, weather, and unforeseen events or discoveries. It is estimated that all excavation and recording will take one to two months, with an additional one month of archival research.

After completion of the final report, artifacts and notes produced by this project will be provided to the Texas Antiquities Committee for disposition as per agreement. The report will be written in the most expeditious manner possible and will be printed in sufficient quantity to satisfy all requirements. As a part of the reporting procedures, the media will be notified of the project, and it is expected that the public will be aware of the project through newspaper and television coverage.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC SOURCES

References to be utilized in obtaining objectives 8 through 10 include the following: Moncure (1984), Fulkes Homestead and Bird Cabin, located near the project area; Moncure (1983), North Central Austin Growth Corridor, near the project area; Briggs (1981), Grant Building, in central Austin; Roberson (1974), Carrington-Covert House; Seelinger (1980), Archeological Reconnaissance on Portions of Walnut Creek; Espey Huston, Associates (1983), Wells Branch Development; Moore et al. (1972), Temporary Capitol; McEachern et al. (1980, 1981), McKinney Homestead; Mercado-Allinger and Ragsdale (1984), Jamail Property, Williamson County; Prikryl and Ragsdale (1984), Scofield Farms, in the project area; and many others (see Daniel Fox 1983).

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